

News Release



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New Alcoholic Beverage Policy Planned for Folsom Lake, Lake Natoma

FOLSOM – In an effort to enhance public safety and combat increasing law enforcement problems, California State Parks will prohibit consumption of alcoholic beverages in day use areas at Folsom Lake and Lake Natoma, effective March 1, 2003, officials announced today.

“The new alcohol policy will assist us in creating a safer recreational environment for all park users,” said Scott Nakaji, the Folsom Sector Superintendent for California State Parks.

Nakaji said alcohol-related problems and resulting citations and arrests by State Park Rangers have been increasing in recent years within the Folsom Lake State Recreation Area, which includes Folsom Lake and Lake Natoma.

State Parks crime reports show that nearly 30 percent of the crimes committed and citations issued at Folsom Lake State Recreation Area are related to alcohol, including a large percentage of arrests for driving under the influence of alcohol. Last year, a man was severely beaten during a youth drinking party in the Dike 7 area of Folsom Lake. One of his alleged attackers is awaiting trial.

“Unfortunately, the units of Folsom Lake State Recreation Area too often have become places for inappropriate partying and drinking rather than for families and individuals to recreate and enjoy,” Nakaji said. “Along with the protection of natural and cultural resources, providing a safe environment for all Californians to enjoy and recreate is part of the mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation.”

The new policy prohibits alcoholic beverage consumption in all day use areas of Folsom Lake and Lake Natoma. It does not apply to registered campers in the campgrounds, or in conjunction with special events approved by the park.

There will be a three-month educational period in which verbal or written warnings will be issued for first time contacts. “State Park Rangers and Lifeguards will be issuing verbal and written warnings until June 1, 2003 because we realize that it will take time for people to get used to the change,” said Nakaji.

Policies prohibiting alcohol consumption have been instituted in 43 parks within the California State Park system, including at Lake Perris State Recreation Area, a Riverside County unit that draws more than 1 million visitors a year, and Millerton Lake State Recreation Area in Fresno County, which attracts some 600,000 visitors annually. Folsom Lake receives about 1.8 million visitors a year.

A review of crime statistics for the Folsom Lake State Recreation Area found that:

- While overall crime has remained relatively constant over the past few years, alcohol-related crime has been on the rise. The problem reached a peak in 2001, when nearly 400 alcohol-related citations were issued within the Folsom Lake State Recreation Area.
- Alcohol-related crime rose from a low of 7 percent of all crime in the Folsom Lake State Recreation Area in 1998 to a high of 22 percent in 2001.
- Between 1997 and 2002, a total of 513 citations were issued to minors in possession of alcohol and minors driving a vehicle with a blood alcohol level of .05 percent or higher.

Nakaji noted that one of the worst areas for alcohol abuse was the Oak Beach area of Granite Bay at Folsom Lake. Oak Beach was closed to vehicles last year due to a temporary shortage in patrolling rangers, and the closure resulted in a reduction of alcohol-related citations and arrests. The Ranger staffing situation has improved and Oak Beach will be reopening to vehicles this year.

“It’s a great thing for park visitors to have vehicular access to that particular area of the park,” said Nakaji. “At the same time we expect that the alcohol consumption policy will alleviate the majority of the alcohol related problems we’ve had in the past.”

“The Oak Beach example drove home the point that alcohol abuse had become a serious problem in the park, and that it was time to take steps to curb it,” he said.

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